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ABSTRACT

A staff development needs assessment survey was conducted by the Adult Literacy Resource Institute, in cooperation with other Boston-area programs providing basic education services for adults, to gather information on what users and potential users of the institute wanted in the areas of inservice teacher education, training, and staff development activities for the coming years. Questionnaires were sent individually to 89 staff people of programs within the Boston Adult Literacy Initiative, and to people at 67 other programs (with an unknown number of total staff) doing basic education for adults. These recipients, in turn, were asked to distribute copies of the questionnaire to the staff at their programs. A total of 189 questionnaires were returned, 30 percent from initiative program questionnaires were returned, 30 percent from initiative program staff and 70 percent from other program staff. The rank order of categories of topic areas for inservice training chosen by the respondents were: (1) general basic education for adults (47%); (2) program administration (44%); (3) counseling (36%); (4) teaching English as a Second Language (33%); (5) teaching reading (32%); (6) teaching writing (31%); (7) teaching in a credential program (20%); (8) teaching math (16%); and (9) others (6%). (NLL)

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A.L.R.I. Occasional Paper #1

Report on the Staff Training Needs Assessment for Programs Offering Basic Education for Adults

Conducted by the Adult Literacy Resource Institute September-October, 1986

Stephen Reuys, A.L.R.I.
January, 1987

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Introduction

This report represents a brief summary of the results of a staff development needs assessment survey conducted by the Adult Literacy Resource Institute in the fall of 1986 with the participation of staff at various Boston-area programs providing basic education services for adults (ABE, ESL, GED, EDP, etc.). We decided to conduct this survey in order to gather information to help us in planning in-service teacher education, training, and staff development activities for the coming years.

We began by drafting a questionnaire, which was then sent to a number of adult educators for their comments and suggestions regarding content, format, etc. Based on their responses and on the further thoughts of A.L.R.I. staff, revisions were made in the questionnaire, and a final draft was prepared.

The questionnaire was distributed as follows: Since we had almost complete staffing lists for the programs within the Boston Adult Literacy Initiative, questionnaires were sent individually to 89 staff people at these Initiative programs, along with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey. Copies were also sent to contact people at 67 other programs (with an unknown number of total staff) doing basic education for adults in the greater Boston area, along with a different cover letter asking that they, in turn, distribute copies of the questionnaire to the staff at their programs.

A total of 189 questionnaires were received in time to be included in this tabulation of results. Of these, 56 (30%) were from Boston Adult Literacy Initiative program staff and 133 (70%) were from other (non-Initiative) program staff. This represents a 63% return rate for Initiative program staff; no return rate can be calculated for other program staff, since, as stated above, the total number of potential respondents was unknown. Responses came from 15 different Initiative programs and from 24 different other programs. A particular program may be represented by anywhere from one to 27 staff responses. A complete list of programs responding and the number of responses from each is attached at the end of this report. An additional 21 responses from four programs were received too late to be included in the current tabulation but may be added to the totals at a future time. Separate totals were maintained for Initiative and non-Initiative programs for internal A.L.R.I. use, but all information given in this report is for the total of all respondents taken together.

Since our purpose was essentially a practical one--to find out what users and potential users of the A.L.R.I. wanted in the area of in-service training--we made no attempt to develop a scientifically-chosen sample, to do follow-up with non-respondents, or to take other steps that would allow for the generalization of the data to broader populations. Accordingly, while useful patterns and conclusions can be drawn from this study with regard to the specific group of respondents, caution must be exercised in ascribing these patterns and conclusions to larger populations. However, since so little information is known in general about adult basic education staff and their own thoughts regarding in-service training and staff development, we are making these survey results available through this report to other programs and to the general public.

Part I

Question #1--More than half of the respondents said they worked at Community-Based Organizations, while another quarter said they worked at Local Educational Agencies.

Question #2--The various types of positions were represented by respondents in the following order of frequency: 1) ESL teachers, 2) ABE teachers, 3) and 4) counselors and administrators (tie), 5) GED/EDP teachers, 6) job preparation/ training program teachers, 7) others, 8) assessors, and 9) volunteer coordinators.

Question #3--A majority of respondents (a total of 55%) said they hold a full-time position or a full-time position plus something else. A total of 35% said they hold one or more part-time positions equivalent to less than full-time. Another 8% said they hold two or more part-time positions equivalent to full-time.

Question #4--Almost half (48%) of respondents had more than five years experience working in adult education. Another quarter (24%) had 1-3 years experience, with the remainder having either less than one year or 3-5 years experience.

Question #5--A plurality (41%) of all respondents had more than five years experience at the type of job they are now doing; the next largest group (21%) had 3-5 years experience. Comments indicated that some experience may have been part-time or volunteer and that persons who had more than one type of position (on Question #2) may well have had different amounts of experience at them as well.

Question #6--Three-quarters of all respondents (76%) stated that workshops and conferences had helped prepare them for their current positions, while over half (57%) checked both "courses" and "on-site in-service training." Half (49%) stated they had a master's degree in education, in their field, or in a related area, while 40% (including some of the same people) had a similarly-defined bachelor's degree, and 15% had further graduate training beyond the master's degree. A quarter (26%) indicated they'd been in a program leading to state teacher certification.

Question #7--About half (52%) of all respondents attended none of the workshops offered by the A.L.R.I. over the past three years; 21% attended one or two, 17% attended 3-6.

Question #8--A large majority (69%) said they were interested in attending A.L.R.I. single-session workshops in the future, a quarter (24%) weren't sure, and only 6% said they definitely weren't interested. People were also asked to comment on why they would or would not want to attend single-session workshops. Reasons for attending included: workshops previously attended were useful, relevant, informative; they present new ideas and provide intellectual stimulation; they give teachers an opportunity to get practical ideas, improve skills, become more effective; they provide an opportunity for networking, sharing information, sharing problems; they allow teachers to determine if that topic is an area they wish to explore further. Reasons for not attending included: workshops previously attended were too elementary, too general, without practical applications, not valuable; presenters were just trying to impress people and out-talk one another; the respondent was moving into another career area, had schedule or time

difficulties, or stated he had no identified need. Others said that attending workshops would depend on the topic, relevance, time, and location of each particular workshop.

Question #9--Interest was somewhat less strong in attending more extensive training events offered by the A.L.R.I. in the future. Equal numbers (44% and 43%) said they were interested or weren't sure; only 12% said definitely not. People were again asked to comment on why they would or would not want to attend more extensive training events. Reasons for attending included: single workshops have little depth, while these would allow for more time, more comprehensiveness; they would provide an opportunity to improve skills, learn new methods and materials, broaden areas of potential service; the respondent felt s/he could use more "formal" training. Reasons for not attending included: the problem of time (the amount of time more extensive training would require) or that the respondent wouldn't be interested unless presenters were well-qualified and knowledgeable about teaching and learning. As with single workshops, other respondents said their attendance would depend on a specific training's topic(s), relevance, time, and location. Two other respondents exemplified one continual dilemma of training--one urged that events be set up as "workgroups," not "trainings," without "experts" as "presenters," while another didn't want to be asked to "perform," but instead wanted presenters to impart knowledge.

Question #10--Respondents were asked to indicate the one or two formats/types of in-service training that they preferred. Two-thirds (66%) chose single-session 2-3 hour workshops, while smaller numbers chose full-day workshops (27%), multiple workshops on the same topic spread out over time (34%), and mini-courses of 2-4 sessions (24%). One respondent commented that a combination of some shorter workshops and some more extensive training events would be best; another suggested that multiple workshops would be best done on a schedule of one per month, while another said full-semester courses would only be a choice if the course were for credit.

Question #11--Respondents were also asked to choose the one or two times when they preferred to attend training events. About half (53%) chose weekday afternoons, a third (34%) chose weekday mornings, a quarter (25%) chose weekday evenings, and a fifth (21%) chose weekends. Comments indicated that preferences would sometimes depend on the particular time of the day and day of the week and on changing teaching schedules; another respondent said s/he would only consider evenings for a semester course.

Question #12--In order to attend training events, the only thing a large number of respondents (61%) indicated they would need was release time from work with pay. One commenter suggested that a stipend would be needed for weekend courses; another said that availability during teaching times would depend not just on release time, but also on the obtaining of substitutes; one asked whether the credit would be graduate or undergraduate.

Question #13--The vast majority of total respondents (over 80%) would be unwilling to pay more than a small registration fee to attend training events. A couple of commenters indicated they wouldn't be willing to pay personally, but that programs should pay for their staff to attend training events; others indicated that the amount they'd be willing to pay would depend on their level of interest in the course and on whether or not it would be good for credit or certification.

Question #14--Almost half (45%) of all respondents indicated they would be interested in obtaining teacher certification in adult basic education if it were available; a quarter (25%) said they weren't sure. A large number of commenters said they were not interested because they already had certification; others said it would depend on what would be required or they would be interested only if it would be obtainable from present experience and education (not additional schooling) or they were not interested because of time; others said that they wouldn't favor mandatory certification, that pay and benefits would have to improve along with any move to certification, that teachers need to have input into developing the requirements, and that the unavailability of certification shows the state's indifference to adults (particularly when some type of certification is still often stated to be an employment requirement).

Question #15--Almost half (47%) of all respondents stated they would not be interested in enrolling in a graduate program in adult basic education, 30% weren't sure, and only 21% said yes. Commenters stated that they would not be interested because they already had a graduate degree or because of time; others said it would depend on the opportunities for full-time employment or on some sort of pay scale linkage; another urged teacher participation in the development of any program.

Part II

Question #1--The overall categories were chosen in the following order by the total group of respondents. (Following each category is the percentage of respondents who selected that area.)

1) General Basic Education for Adults (47%)
2) Program Administration (44%)
3) Counseling (36%)
4) Teaching English as a Second Language (33%)
5) Teaching Reading (32%)
6) Teaching Writing (31%)
7) Teaching in a Credential Program--GED/EDP (20%)
8) Teaching Math (16%)
9) Others (6%)

Question #2--No single specific topic was selected by a majority of respondents. Twenty-eight topics (of the 94 suggested) were selected by 50 or more (out of 189) respondents. Twelve are from the "General Basic Education for Adults" area, six from "Counseling," four from "Program Administration," three from "Teaching Writing," two from "Teaching Reading," one from "Teaching in a Credential Program," and none from "Teaching ESL" or "Teaching Math." They are as follows: (After each topic is the overall area in which it is found.)

Chosen by 80 or more respondents:

Adult Learning Styles/Teaching Strategies (General)
Teaching Critical Thinking/Creative Thinking (General)

Chosen by 70 or more respondents:

Developing a Curriculum (General)
Integrating Reading and Writing (Writing)
Proposal Writing (Administration)

Chosen by 60 or more respondents:

Working with Students Who Are Having Trouble Learning (General)
Linking Basic Education with Vocational Training and Higher Education (General)
Integrating Reading and Writing (Reading)
Overview of Approaches and Methods (Writing)
Student Motivation and Retention (Counseling)
Cross-Cultural Aspects of Counseling (Counseling)
Managing an Education Program (Administration)
Program Evaluation (Administration)

Chosen by 50 or more respondents:

Improving Your Skills in Group Instruction (General)
Improving Your Skills in Individualized Instruction (General)
Diagnosis and Assessment of Students (General)
Connections Between ESL and ABE (General)
"Teaching from Strengths"/Cultural-Based Uses of Language (General)
Computer-Assisted Instruction/Computer-Managed Instruction (General)
Teaching Study Skills (General)
Overview of Approaches and Methods (Reading)
The Role of Grammar Instruction (Writing)
The New 1988 GED (Credential)
Introduction to Counseling (Counseling)
Personal Counseling in a Classroom Setting (Counseling)
Counseling ESL Students (Counseling)
Vocational Counseling (Counseling)
Staff Supervision and Evaluation (Administration)

* *

Within each area, the top five topics were as follows: (After each topic is the number of respondents who chose it.)

General Basic Education for Adults

Adult Learning Styles/Teaching Strategies (88)
Teaching Critical Thinking/Creative Thinking (81)
Developing a Curriculum (73)
Working with Students Who Are Having Trouble Learning (64)
Linking Basic Education with Vocational Training and Higher Education (62)

Teaching English as a Second Language

Teaching Reading and Writing (49)
Overview of Approaches and Methods (46)
Creating or Revising an ESL Curriculum (46)
Teaching Listening and Speaking (44)
Literacy/Pre-Reading (43)

Teaching Reading
- Integrating Reading and Writing (65)
- Overview of Approaches and Methods (57)
- Building Comprehension (49)
- Applications of Freire in Learning to Read English (44)
- Creating Your Own Instructional Materials and Activities (43)

Teaching Writing
- Integrating Reading and Writing (76)
- Overview of Approaches and Methods (66)
- The Role of Grammar Instruction (54)
- Creating or Revising a Writing Curriculum (45)
- Holistic Approaches (38)

Teaching Math
- Overview of Approaches and Methods (46)
- Problem Areas in Teaching Basic Math (39)
- Multi-Cultural Math (35)
- Word Problems (29)
- Creating Your Own Instructional Materials and Activities (23, tie)
- Creating or Revising a Math Curriculum (23, tie)

Teaching in a Credential Program
- The New 1988 GED (54)
- ESL Connections to Credential Options (31)
- GED Instruction (30)
- ABE Connections to Credential Options (23)
- EDP Instruction (20, tie)
- GED/EDP Comparisons/Choosing a Credential Program (20, tie)

Counseling
- Student Motivation and Retention (66)
- Cross-Cultural Aspects of Counseling (60)
- Personal Counseling in a Classroom Setting (57)
- Vocational Counseling (56)
- Counseling ESL Students (52)

Program Administration
- Proposal Writing (73)
- Managing an Education Program (69)
- Program Evaluation (62)
- Staff Supervision and Evaluation (58)
- Fund-Raising (45)

Respondents

The following is a list of the Boston Adult Literacy Initiative Programs represented in the responses to this survey, along with the number of respondents from each program.

ABCD (Action for Boston Community Development) -- 7
Cardinal Cushing Center -- 3
Charlestown Community School -- 3
East Boston Harborside Community School -- 5
Haitian Multi-Service Center -- 5
Jackson/Mann Community School -- 3
Jamaica Plain Community School -- 5
Jewish Vocational Services -- 2
Mujeres Unidas en Accion -- 4
Occupational Literacy Program -- 1
Quincy Community School -- 3
United South End Settlements -- 3
WAITT House -- 5
Washington Hill Association -- 2
WEAVE/Women, Inc. -- 5

The following is a list of the other (non-Initiative) programs represented in the responses to this survey, along with the number of respondents from each program.

Boston Indian Council -- 1
Boston Technical Center -- 2
Cape Verdean Community House -- 1
Casa del Sol -- 4
Catholic Charitable Bureau -- 2
Chelsea Adult Basic Education -- 10
Chinese-American Civic Association -- 7
Collaborations for Literacy (Boston University) -- 1
College/Community Collaborative (Roxbury Community College) -- 9
Community Learning Center (Cambridge) -- 11
Condon Community School -- 1
Continuing Education Institute -- 1
EDCO Youth Alternative -- 8
Employment Connections, Inc. -- 7
International Institute of Boston -- 10
Leading Edge Training Center -- 3
League of Haitian Families -- 6
Learning Development Center -- 5
Middlesex Employment and Training Program --1
Polaroid/Inner City -- 4
SCALE (Somerville) -- 27
South Boston Neighborhood House -- 5
South End Adults at Cathedral -- 6
YMCA International Services -- 1